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ABSTRACT

Historically, Americans have employed the rhetorical motif "reaffirmation of principle" to cope with the social evils in their midst. This concept refers to the tendency of groups to respond to outside hostility by regrouping and reaffirming their ethos through a form of self-address. Reaffirmation of principle, like managerial rhetoric, is concerned with the status quo. Literature concerned with the rhetoric of reaffirmation can be found in the research on social movements. In addition, American history provides examples of such rhetoric in Revolutionary War public addresses, specifically, in Loyalist Tory ministers' sermons. The ministers hoped to revitalize the congregation's allegiance to England by reaffirming the principle of the divine right of kings. Generally, the preachers detailed the prescribed behaviors for the faithful, emphasized the inviolability of the sacred principle, and provided a dramatization of an evil world uninformed by it. In closing, the preachers moved from the rhetoric of explanation and persuasion to that of implementation, outlining a plan for those showing resolve. Though generalizations about reaffirmation of principle as a rhetorical motif are premature, potential areas of study include (1) social movements, (2) functional analysis, (3) group/organizational theory, (4) historical reconstruction and interpretation, and (5) ideology and symbolism. (JD)

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GROUP SURVIVAL AND THE RHETORIC OF REAFFIRMATION: SOME EXPLORATORY OBSERVATIONS

by

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presented at

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GROUP SURVIVAL AND THE RHETORIC OF REAFFIRMATION: SOME EXPLORATORY OBSERVATIONS

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"Rhetorical communities bound together by a common vision and sustained by a common communication style," Ernest Bormann has written, "generally have to deal with the social reality of evil."[1] My paper addresses Professor Bormann's observation from the perspective of American experience. A work in progress, it examines a rhetorical motif Americans have used to cope with social evil in their midst. I call this motif "Reaffirmation of Principle."

My examination divides into three parts. First, I characterize this pattern of discourse. Included in this discussion is a brief review of the literature concerned with the rhetoric of reaffirmation. Then, I offer a case study: sermons Tory ministers delivered during the American Revolution. Presented last are some general reflections on implications and future research.[2]

I

The particular rhetorical circumstance in which social evil is addressed that I am concerned with in this study can be defined in the following terms: On occasion, groups, to counter attack from without, need to do more than respond to their critics. They must also regroup. That is, outside hostility sometimes engenders a renewing within. Groups rededicate themselves, reaffirming their ethos through a form of self-address. Comments Hugh Dalziel Duncan, a sociologist: "social order... is enacted in social dramas in which actors attempt to uphold... the principles of that social order."[3]

Reaffirmation of principle, then, is related to the rhetoric to manage. Like managerial rhetoric, reaffirmation is concerned with maintaining the status quo. As Robert Cathcart observes about the rhetoric to manage:

> it can be very useful to our understanding of sociopolitical activities if we can distinquish between these rhetorical acts which by their form uphold and re-enforce... [a] system and those which reject the system, its hierarchy and its values. Needless to say, the great bulk of communication in any society must [be managerial]. As Scott, Bevilacquar and others have pointed out, almost all Aristotelian rhetorics are managerial in form. They are designed to keep the existing system viable: they do not question underlying epistemology and group ethic.[4]

Examples of reaffirmation of principle are found in the research on social movements. Work on the theory of social movements identifies reaffirmation as a dynamic characteristic of these groups. Herbert Simons, for instance, suggests that leadership of a movement must be able to resist "counter-influence" in order to maintain an efficiently organized unit.[5] Similarly, studies of individual social movements also address the phenomenon of group reaffirmation. Both the literature on conservative resistance movements and the literature on reform/radical movements contain case studies that explore rhetoric that reaffirms group principle. An example from the latter genre is Richard Gregg's "The Ego-Function of the Rhetoric of Protest," wherein the author writes that "the primary appeal of the rhetoric of protest is to the protesters themselves, who feel the need for psychological refurbishing and affirmation."[6]

II

American history provides examples of reaffirmation of principle rhetoric in Revolutionary War public address, more particularly in Loyalist preaching from the period. Evidence points to Tory ministers freely employing this rhetorical motif in their sermons. Clergy who delivered sermons that reaffirmed principle--and whose texts have survived--include the Reverends Jonathan Boucher, Charles Inglis, and Samuel Seabury.[7]

The site of one of these addresses was St. George's Chapel, an Anglican church in New York City. On January 30, 1780, Reverend Inglis preached before the congregation.[8] Rector of Trinity Church, the mother Anglican church in the city, Inglis was an ardent and celebrated Loyalist. Feted in Tory poetry, he essayed a rejoinder to Thomas Paine's "Common Sense," upbraided George Washington publically and in person for his disloyalty, and was declared by the New York Assembly a state criminal who faced execution if captured in the colony. After the Revolution, Inglis fled America for Nova Scotia, where he was honored as the first colonial bishop of the Anglican Communion.[9]

In speaking at St. George's, the reverend had one goal: to rally the congregation in its loyalty to England. Inglis' challenge was to create for his listeners a reality rich in ideology as well as symbols that would confirm and support the audience in its beliefs.[10] To accomplish this end, he rehearsed in his remarks the principle most central to the audience's position, the divine right of kings. By reaffirming the congregation's faith in this principle, he hoped to revitalize its allegiance to the homeland.

Citing scripture, Inglis began his sermon by underlining significant--and timely--precepts related to the divine sovereignty doctrine. The principle, he stated, is inviolable:

> The personal character of the magistrate [is] not to interfere with the civil duty of the subject:even when bad, it [does] not dissolve the obligation of the latter.... The Christian therefore, is here enjoined to honour the person who is vested with legal authority, and whom the Providence hath placed over him... not withstanding the character of that prince.[11]

Moreover, he pointed out, the principle prescribes specific behaviors for the faithful:

> To honour the king, is to entertain respectful sentiments of his authority and person--to speak always with deference to both--to promote the peace and stability of his reign, and pay a cheerful obedience to his laws-- to check, as far as we are able, the calumnies which sedition or malice would propagate to his disadvantage, to oppose the proceedings which would disturb or endanger his authority-- and to promote these sentiments and this conduct among others.[12]

Most important, Inglis observed, the principle is sacred:

> We have the express commands of God, of his inspired prophets and apostles for discharging this duty. We should certainly be punctual in the observation of a duty which is so often and so earnestly enjoined by the authority of heaven. When it is 'the will of God' and required of us for 'the Lord's sake,' we should conscientiously practice it. Can any authority be greater than that of the almighty?[13]

Closely reasoned, these points appear calculated to renew resolve through clarification. From the myriad concerns related to the concept of divine sovereignty, they bring to the foreground those concerns of greatest import to the congregation in its present circumstances (do conditions mitigate adherence? What is expected of the faithful? How deeply embedded in the Anglican world view is this principle?). Such focus could both clarify belief and affirm a code of conduct.

Having explicated the divine right of kings-- elucidated its essential meaning and application-- Inglis then considered the social evil menacing the congregation and its fealty to the doctrine. What, he asked, would be the reality of a world uninformed by this belief? The answer he gave dramatized a forbidding social landscape.

> When disrespectful sentiments of the sovereign are entertained...it leads to disrespectful and seditious language; and the transition is easy and natural from the language to the practice of sedition. He that freely indulges himself in that language, wants only an opportunity to realize, and reduce it to practice.

> Now reflect for a moment on the horrid train of evils which follow rebellion. The first stages of its progress are carried on by deceit, violence and perjury. It is dreadful even in its mildest effects. It is stained with blood, and diffuses general distress and misery. The ruin of millions attend it. All the dark, malevolent passions of the soul are roused and exerted; its mild and amiable affections are suppressed; and with them, virtuous principles are laid prostrate. Hence it is that civil wars are always more cruel and barbarous than foreign wars, and more destructive to morals; in the former, personal revenge and animosity mingle, and kindle up the soul to tenfold rage. Reckon over the benefits which government confers on mankind: and the evil which is contrary to each of these benefits, is brought on mankind by rebellion. Add to all this, that when successful, it generally ends in tyranny, and the most grievous oppression.[14]

The lessons of history, Inglis went on, bear witness to the "grievous" nature of a social order that turns from kingly rule. As a case in point, he cited England's past. "I shall not take up your time with a minute detail of the rise, progress and effects of [the] rebellion against Charles I," Inglis said, "[but] suffice it to observe, that it [the rebellion] began with the breach of... [the] precept... honour the king... [, and]... each of these particulars [just mentioned] was literally verified in the rebellion."[15] Symbolically connecting this event from the past with current events, the reverend added that that very day marked the 131st anniversary of the usurpation of King Charles.

Inglis' message was clear: the alternative to royal rule offered no alternative at all. "...[W]ere the consequences of honouring the king, put into the one scale, and the effects of neglecting it, put into the other," Inglis instructed, "it is easy to see which would preponderate....[C]ommanded by the word of God--warned by the example of others, and taught by our own experience, let us firmly resolve... to... 'Honour the king.'"[16]

In closing, Inglis moved from the rhetoric of explanation and persuasion to the rhetoric of implementation. He outlined a battle plan for showing resolve. Echoing a motif in American public address fantasy theme critics call "Fetching Good Out of Evil," the reverend reminded the congregation that God had visited the Revolution on Englishmen for their sinfulness and would remove his curse only upon their repenting.[17]

> The times admonish us to examine our ways, humble ourselves before God, and turn to him with unfeigned repentance. Proceeding by the same rules which he hath always observed towards offending nations, his judgements are gone forth to visit us for our abuse of his mercies, our barrenness under his Gospel, and the other numberless transgressions by which we have provoked him....

> If any persons among us, by their vicious lives, dishonour God and provoke him; they are worse enemies to us than [the] rebels. They make the God of nature our adversary, who can summon the powers of nature, and arm every element, to work our destruction, and defeat our designs....
>
> Evidently, it is by a religious regard to... Christian [considerations], and by this only, that we can expect the almighty will be reconciled to us; that he will remove our calamities, call back the sword from destroying, bid discord cease, and command peace, with its attending blessings to revisit us....
>
> Influenced by those motives, let us, in the name of God, and in his strength, resolutely set about this conduct: Cheered with the pleasing hope which results from it, when pursued... let each of us then... cultivate this divine temper.[18]

Accountability was, in a word, individual. Restoring the commonweal depended on each person reaffirming "this divine temper."

III

Generalizations about reaffirmation of principle as a rhetorical motif are premature. Further research is required before conclusions can be formulated. Potential areas of study include:

1) Social movements

Work in this area on the rhetoric of reaffirmation should continue. In The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control, John Waite Bowers and Donovan Ochs posit a typology of social movements. They identify the Loyalist side in the American Revolution with a pattern of low ideological strength and low rhetorical sophistication.[19] Addresses like Inglis' challenge these findings.

2) Functional analysis

Do certain rhetorical techniques lend themselves to the purpose of reaffirmation? Dale Leathers found that the rhetorical strategy of the John Birch Society "was highly functional for the maintenance of ingroup solidarity."[20] W. Richard Ullman and Edward Bodaken believe "resistance to change is a function of the persuasive strategy employed to induce an attitude."[21] Much can be learned from studies that examine reaffirmation rhetoric by correlating outcome with approach.

3) Group/Organizational theory

Understanding the phenomenon of reaffirmation in terms of life stages might prove profitable. How do the rhetorics of group building and group maintenance compare?[22] Similarly, the rhetoric of reaffirmation in

light of external threat as opposed to the rhetoric of reaffirmation in light of group fragmentation? What role does such discourse play in maintaining leaders in their positions of power?

4) Historical reconstruction and interpretation

Fantasy theme critics encourage thematic as well as chronological examination of the history of public address.

> Delineating major rhetorical [motifs] in the history of Colonial North America and the United States is an alternative way of structuring the history of [American] public address. [Only] borrow[ing] a structure from a survey history approach which divides the material into historical periods often ignores important rhetorical similarities and constrasts.[23]

Noting the working of the "Fetching Good Out of Evil" theme in Inglis' sermon enhances our understanding of that sermon's place in American history. What other ties can be made between historical themes and occasions of group reaffirmation?[24]

5) Ideology and Symbolism

Richard Hofstadter, an historian, suggests that the fundamentalist "looks upon the world as an arena for conflict between absolute good and absolute evil... scorn[s] compromises (who can compromise with Satan?) and can tolerate no ambiguities."[25] Do the circumstances of group reaffirmation engender a similar mind-set? What impact does reaffirmation have on a group's belief system? Does it foster powerful imagery and symbols? Are anniversaries and leaders who cut a colorful figure the stuff of reaffirmation?

"The dilemma is an old one," Robert Scott writes, "how can one unite his forces against some external group on grounds that will not be disruptive internally."[26] Old too is the challenge of having the center hold, which is what the reaffirmation of principle is all about.

Notes

[1] Ernest Bormann, "Fetching Good Out of Evil: A Rhetorical Use of Calamity," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 63, (April 1977), 130.

[2] This study is based on a paper I prepared for a course in the history of American public address at the University of Minnesota. The course instructor was Professor Ernest Bormann.

[3] Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Symbols in Society (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 123.

[4] Robert Cathcart, "Movements: Confrontation as Rhetorical Form," The Southern Speech Communication Journal, 43 (Spring 1978), 237-38.

[5] Charles Stewart, "A Functional Approach to the Rhetoric of Social Movements," Central States Speech Journal, 31, (Winter 1980), 299; Also see: Herbert Simons, "Requirements, Problems, and Strategies: A Theory of Persuasion for Social Movements," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 56, (February 1970), 1-2.

[6] Richard Gregg, "The Ego-Function of the Rhetoric of Protest," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 4, (Spring 1971), 74; Also see: John Waite Bowers and Donovan Ochs, The Rhetoric of Agitation and Control (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1971); Andrew King and Floyd Anderson, "Nixon, Agnew, and the 'Silent Majority': A Case Study in the Rhetoric of Polarization," Western Speech, 35, (Fall 1971), 243-55; Randall Lake, "Enacting Red Power: The Consummatory Function in Native American Protest Rhetoric," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 69, (May 1983), 127-142; Martha Solomon, "Redemptive Rhetoric: The Continuity Motif in the Rhetoric of Right To Life," Central States Speech Journal, 31, (Spring 1977), 256-73.

[7] Jonathan Boucher, A View of the Causes and Consequences of the American Revolution in Thirteen Discourses (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967), see "On Civil Liberty; Passive Obedience, and Non-Resistance;" Readex Microprint, Early American Imprints 1639-1800 (Worcester: 1963), for Charles Inglis, see: "The Christian Soldier's Duty Briefly Delineated" and "The Duty of Honouring the King, Explained and Recommended;" for Samuel Seabury, see: "St. Peter's Exhortation to Fear God and Honor the King, Explained and Inculcated."

[8] Readex, "The Duty," see: Evans number 16810.

[9] Winthrop Sargent, The Loyalist Poetry of the Revolution (Boston: Milford House, 1972), p. 24; Philip Davidson, Propaganda and The American Revolution 1763-1783 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941), pp. 253-254; Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932) IX, p. 476; Arthur Eaton, The Church of England in Nova Scotia and the Tory Clergy of the Revolution (New York: Thomas Whittaker,

1891), pp. 122-3; Alexander Flick, History of the State of New York (New York: The New York State Historical Association, 1933), III, pp. 287-8; Alexander Flick, Loyalism in New York During the American Revolution (New York: Columbia Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, 1901), XIV, pp. 145-7.

[10] Solomon, 52.

[11] Readex, "The Duty," p. 2.

[12] Ibid., p. 12.

[13] Ibid., p. 15.

[14] Ibid., pp. 22-3.

[15] Ibid., pp. 23-4.

[16] Ibid., pp. 27-8.

[17] Bormann.

[18] Readex, "The Duty," pp. 36-9.

[19] Bowers, pp. 138, 142.

[20] Stewart, 299.

[21] W. Richard Ullman and Edward Bodaken, "Inducing Resistance to Persuasive Attack: A Test of Two Strategies of Communication," Western Speech Communication, 39, (Fall 1975), 241.

[22] Wayne Brockriede and Robert Scott, "Stokely Carmichael: Two Speeches on Black Power," Central States Speech Journal, 19, (Spring 1968), 7. Brockriede and Scott discuss the rhetoric of group building.

[23] Ernest Bormann, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: Ten Years Later," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 68, (August 1982), 303.

[24] See, for Example, Solomon.

[25] Richard Hofstadter, Anti-intellectualism in American Life (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1963), p. 135.

[26] Robert Scott, "The Conservative Voice in Radical Rhetoric: A Common Response to Division," Speech Monographs, 40, (June 1973), 130.

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